

# MEMORANDUM



## Public Works Department

---

**Date:** November 23, 2015

**To:** Tempe City Council

**From:** Jason Hartong, Senior Planner (350-2747)  
Mike Nevarez, Transit Manager (858-2209)

**Thru:** Don Bessler, Public Works Director (350-8205)  
Shelly Seyler, Deputy Public Works Director – Transportation (350-8854)

**Subject:** Orbit Saturn  
**December 3, 2015 Issue Review Session**

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to provide the City Council with community feedback gathered during the three phases of the Orbit Saturn planning process and to present the final route recommendation.

### BACKGROUND

In June 2014, the Tempe City Council authorized staff to conduct a public involvement process to explore implementing Orbit neighborhood circulator service in the area between US 60 and Elliot Road from the east city border with Mesa to the west city border with Guadalupe and Phoenix.

Currently, there are five neighborhood circulator routes operating in Tempe. The five routes are Earth, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury and Venus. All Orbit routes operate with no fare required and serve the area north of US 60. Orbit service operates seven days a week from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. with 15 minute frequency on weekdays. Weekend service operates at a slightly reduced level.

The planning process included a three-phased effort to understand community preferences for service standards such as hours, frequency and days of service as well as desired destinations within the planning area. Community meetings for the three planning phases were held in January, April/May and September 2015 at Marcos de Niza High School. The meetings were intended to introduce residents to Orbit service and to explain the history of the service and the characteristics of neighborhood circulators. An Orbit bus and a standard transit bus were on display during the Phase I meetings to familiarize participants with the vehicles.

To garner the best participation possible by Tempe residents, the following occurred:

- Approximately 23,500 door hangers were distributed during each phase of the process to businesses, schools, apartment complexes, condos and single family residences within the target planning area.

- Approximately 6,000 post cards were mailed during each phase of the process to single family homes located in areas with organized neighborhood associations.
- Reminder emails to neighborhood and homeowner association contacts in the area.

Communication methods used to promote the meetings and online comment form included:

- Tempe Today articles
- Press releases
- Door hangers
- Social media
- Tempe 11
- City online calendar
- Project web site/online comment form
- Handouts at city events and meetings

To complement the public involvement process, staff met with several stakeholder groups including local school districts, community associations, the Transportation Commission, Neighborhood Advisory Commission and the Commission on Disability Concerns. Meetings occurred in conjunction with the three feedback phases so that comments received from these groups could be considered in the development of the upcoming phase. Because the Town of Guadalupe is immediately adjacent to the Orbit Saturn planning area, Tempe staff communicated with Guadalupe officials to inform them of our project. An offer was extended to include Guadalupe in the planning process with the understanding that transit service within Guadalupe town limits would be their financial responsibility. While there was initially some interest from Guadalupe, subsequent attempts to communicate were unsuccessful and the process continued without their involvement.

## **RESULTS**

Community meeting participants were enthusiastic about the expansion of service and contributed valuable feedback both in person and through the survey responses. Participant feedback was used to guide every step of the route development process. Community member involvement was impressive, demonstrating a strong interest in the program. The statistics for participation are as follows:

- Phase I (January 2015): 118 meeting attendees; 128 comment forms submitted
- Phase II (April-May 2015): 74 meeting attendees; 82 comment forms submitted
- Phase III (September 2015): 52 meeting attendees; 70 comment forms submitted

In order to gather information relative to the design and implementation of new Orbit service, residents were given the opportunity to provide input on a number of service parameters that define service characteristics such as destinations, hours, frequency and days of service. Input was gathered through surveys which were made available during the meetings and online.

Although the concept of the neighborhood circulator was initially presented as the purpose of Orbit service, the desire for the service to travel out of the service area to the Tempe Public Library immediately surfaced. Many seniors indicated the need and desire to attend activities at the Pyle Senior Center as the reason. Many other residents wanted to link with existing Orbit Jupiter service to reach

destinations closer to downtown. Although attendees were briefed on the ramifications of extending Orbit service beyond the planning area, many were adamant about the destination.

In preparation for Phase II meetings, staff developed four draft routes for consideration. Each route was designed based on the information gained during the earlier survey effort. Routes were proposed to operate in areas with the greatest number of survey responses, and included travel to many of the destinations requested. Two of the four draft routes included travel to the Tempe Library complex.

The Phase II survey results indicated that respondents had a strong preference for Option D (see Attachment 5), a long-distance route covering much of the target planning area including the library. Because of the size of the route, the program budget only supports about 13 hours of operation per day, with buses arriving every 30 minutes. The existing Orbit routes operate about 16 hours per day every 15 minutes.

Community feedback from Phase III was overwhelmingly positive, with 84% of survey respondents in favor of the proposed route (see Attachment 2). Participants commonly stated that they were satisfied with the process and results and commended staff for incorporating their feedback in the program design. The majority of non-supportive comments stated that the proposed route would not serve to their neighborhood or that the route spent too much time traveling on arterial streets rather than in neighborhoods.

During Phase III, staff presented a final route recommendation based on Option D, but incorporating changes that had come as a result of the Phase II feedback. The route would operate every 30 minutes with service on weekdays and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sundays from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. The route design and operating parameters met the \$1.2 million program operating budget. During the final staff evaluation of the proposed program, a concern surfaced in regards to the proposed weekday start time of 8 a.m. This start time would not permit students to use Orbit Saturn for travel to school in the morning. While there was no specific community feedback requesting an earlier start time, it was determined that the recommended start time would be moved to 7 a.m.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Staff estimates that it would cost \$1.2 million (Tempe Transit Tax Fund) annually to operate a 10-mile Orbit route. The expansion of the fleet would be paid with Federal Grant and Regional Public Transportation Funds.

### **NEXT STEPS**

At their Nov. 12 meeting, the Transportation Commission voted to support the proposed route. With Council direction, staff will begin the vehicle procurement process and other steps needed to properly implement service in October 2017. The timeline is below.

- Jan. 2016: begin vehicle procurement process
- Nov. 2016: Initiate Valley Metro new service implementation process
- Aug. 2017: Install infrastructure/signs for Orbit stops
- Oct. 2017: Implement route; notify residents along route via door hanger with route map

### **ATTACHMENTS**

- 1) PowerPoint Presentation
- 2) Map of the recommended Orbit Saturn route
- 3) Public Involvement Plan
- 4) Public comments and meeting transcripts
- 5) Phase 2 proposed Saturn route maps